

October 28, 2014

Dear Superintendent:

The Center for Evaluation and Education Policy (CEEP) at Indiana University's School of Education is planning to conduct an evaluation study of BrainWare SAFARI, a novel instructional approach that might accelerate the development of children's cognitive skills and yield positive impacts on their academic achievement. I've reviewed the BrainWare Company's prior studies of this intervention and there is initial evidence that BrainWare SAFARI can yield positive outcomes for students; those students who used the intervention, relative to a control group, experienced considerably better growth in terms of their cognitive and academic achievement. However, more evidence is needed to determine whether it is a good idea to consider broadly adopting BrainWare SAFARI in Indiana's elementary schools.

There are many ways to generate such evidence, but the randomized controlled trial is the most powerful research design for understanding if an intervention makes a difference on student achievement. CEEP's plan is to develop a study where whole schools will be assigned, by lottery, to either use BrainWare SAFARI or simply follow typical instructional routines. Subject to Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, the current plan - beginning next year - would be to conduct the study with students in grades three through five. If a meaningful instructional effect is found, control schools will be given access to the intervention in the 2017-2018 school year. The BrainWare SAFARI intervention will be made available free of charge to all participating schools upon completion of the study.

As director of CEEP, I hope you'll consider encouraging your schools to join the proposed study. Please know that: (1) The study will be conducted with the highest methodological rigor. CEEP staff have considerable experience with randomized controlled trials and school-based research. (2) The study will be a fully independent evaluation of BrainWare SAFARI. That is, CEEP staff will have total control over the study design, random assignment procedures, data collection, analyses, report writing, and publishing. CEEP will publish a report no matter the findings; there is absolutely no fiduciary relationship between CEEP and The BrainWare Company. Furthermore, CEEP staff have previously published results of similar studies showing an intervention has not made a difference – this is important because we need to know what actually helps us to educate children, and what does not. (3) Teachers and administrators are research-practitioners. We need you to join studies so scientific procedures can guide our collective decisions to improve curricula. I certainly know that school staff in Indiana, and across the country, are busy but they need to know if novel, promising approaches – like BrainWare SAFARI - will help them with their work.

To summarize, you're being asked to consider encouraging your schools to join a study that should yield important answers about a novel approach to improving children's cognitive skills and achievement. This study will be run by CEEP, an independent group that exists to generate evidence to help school leaders make informed decisions. When you have questions please give us a call at (812) 855-4438. Ask for Dr. Patricia Muller, Director of Evaluation and Research. I'll be happy to talk with you as well. Of course, you can visit our website at any time:
ceep.indiana.edu.

Sincerely,



John Hitchcock, Ph.D.
Director, Center for Evaluation & Education Policy

cc: P. Muller, CEEP